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ABSTRACT

This study investigates cross-cultural differences in students' acceptance of their parents' values about education and social activities. It also examines the relation between acceptance of values and such factors as type of values, knowledge of parental values, mathematics achievement, and psychological well-being. Participants were over 3,000 American, Chinese, and Japanese 5th and 11th graders and their parents. Children were given a mathematics test. The 5th graders and their mothers were interviewed and their fathers completed a questionnaire. The 11th graders filled out a questionnaire and a subsample of their mothers were interviewed. Values of 5th graders studied were the importance of doing well in mathematics and reading. Values of 11th graders studied were those of going to college, getting good grades, having many friends, being good at sports, having dates, and having a part-time job. Findings indicated that parent-child conflicts in America were limited to social activities. Compared to Asian students, American students knew more about and were in greater agreement with parents' values concerning academic achievement. Overall, students were in greater disagreement with parents in the social domain than the academic domain. In general, student knowledge of parental values was positively related to agreement with the values. Student acceptance of values was positively related to psychological well-being. (RH)

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American, Chinese, and Japanese Students' Acceptance of Their Parents' Values About Academic and Social Activities[1]

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Inculcation of values is an important part of socialization. Parents attempt to transmit values to their children, but children may or may not accept those values. In line with recent research on parent-child agreement on beliefs and values (Goodnow, 1984, 1988; Sigel, 1984), this study investigates cross-cultural differences in students' acceptance of their parents' values about education (getting good grades and going to college) and social activities (e.g., having many friends, and having dates). It also examines the relation between acceptance of values and such factors as type of values, knowledge of parental values, math achievement, and psychological well-being.

Methods

More than 3000 American, Chinese, and Japanese fifth and eleventh graders and their parents participated in this study. Fifth-grade children were given a math test and were interviewed. Their mothers were also interviewed and their fathers were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Eleventh-grade students were also given a math test and asked to fill out a questionnaire, and a subsample of the mothers were interviewed.

Students were asked about their own and their parents' values concerning academic achievement and social activities. The values studied are:

Grade 5:	Importance of doing well in math
	Importance of doing well in reading
Grade 11:	Importance of going to college
	Importance of getting good grades
	Importance of having many friends
	Importance of being good at sports
	Importance of having dates
	Importance of having a part-time job

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Results

1. Do students accept their parents' values?

Acceptance of value was defined as students' own values in agreement with their perception of parental values.

Insert Table 1 about here

Summary of Table 1:

(a). At fifth grade, more American students than Chinese students and more Chinese students than Japanese students accepted their parents' values concerning academic achievement, especially that concerning math achievement.

(b). At eleventh grade, more American students than Chinese students and more Chinese students than Japanese students accepted their parents' values concerning going to college. In the area of dating, sports, and having a part-time job, however, more Japanese and Chinese students than American students accepted their parents' values. As for the value of having many friends, more Japanese than Chinese and US students agreed with their parents.

(c). Age differences: In general, slightly fewer eleventh graders than fifth graders accepted their parents' values concerning academic achievement.

(d). Sex differences (not shown in tables): There were no significant sex differences among fifth graders, except that more girls in Japan accepted their mothers' value concerning the importance of doing well reading, $p < .01$. At eleventh grade, more girls than boys accepted parents' values concerning sports in all three locations. In addition, more girls accepted their parents' value about dating in Taiwan, and more boys accepted their parents' values about having a part-time job in Japan.

(e). Domain differences: Looking at eleventh graders, more students showed disagreement with their parents' values about social activities than about academic

achievement. Further analyses showed that the disagreement in social activities reflects the fact that students generally thought their parents valued social activities less than they themselves did (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

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2. Do students know their parents' values?

Knowledge of parental values is defined as the agreement between students' perception of parental values and parents' actual values (obtained from parent interview).

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows:

(a). At fifth grade, there was greater agreement between children' perceptions of parental values and parents' actual values among American than among Chinese and Japanese children.

(b). At eleventh grade, only 15% to 38% of the students' ratings agreed with their parents' actual ratings. If we take into account the fact that, for 7-point scales, the students' answers would by chance match their parents' 14.3% of the time, very few of the students' perceptions of parental values in both cultures actually agreed with their parents' actual values concerning social activities.

3. Correlates of value acceptance.

(a). **Knowledge of parents' values.** There was some evidence for a positive relation between students' knowledge of their parents' values and their acceptance of those values. Out of 24 correlations calculated, 17 were positive and 12 were statistically significant. The more students knew their parents' values, the more likely they were to agree with their parents' values. This is especially true for the values about academic achievement.

(b). **Maternal education.** No significant correlation was found between maternal education and students' acceptance of parental values, *r*'s from -.14 to .17, N's=99-201.

(c). **Math achievement.** Acceptance of parental values was not related to students' math achievement, *r*'s from -.07 to .01.

(d). **Psychological well-being.** Five measures of eleventh-grade students' psychological well-being were constructed. They were (a) frequency of feeling depressed, (b) frequency of feeling stressed, (c) frequency of aggressive feelings, such as feeling hitting someone and feeling destroying things, (d) life dissatisfaction, and (e) evidence of 8 psychosomatic symptoms (such as feeling tired for no reason, lost appetite, had trouble sleeping, headache, etc.). As Table 4 shows, agreement with parental values was negatively related to the indicators of psychological distress, though the relation seemed weaker in Japan.

Conclusions

1. Cross-cultural differences: Parent-child conflicts in America were found to be limited to social activities. Compared to Asian students, American students knew more about and were in greater agreement with their parents' values concerning academic achievement. On the other hand, the often described close parent-child relations in Japan were not evident.

2. The only consistent sex differences in students' acceptance of parental values were found in the area of sports. Boys were in greater disagreement with their parents' values than girls were.

3. Overall, students were in greater disagreement with their parents in the social domain than that in the academic domain. Students tended think that their parents did not value social activities as much.

4. Students' knowledge of parental values was in general positively related to their agreement with those values. Maternal education and students' math achievement were not found to have any relations with students' acceptance of parental values.

5. Students' acceptance, however, was positively related to their psychological well-being. The causal direction is unclear.

References

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Table 1. Percent of students whose own values were in agreement with their perceptions of parental values.

	Japan	Taiwan	US	X^2
Fifth grade				
Mothers				
Math	45.0	61.3	78.6	38.92***
Reading	54.4	57.5	67.7	6.95*
Father				
Math	49.5	62.2	75.6	20.96***
Reading	55.3	68.9	68.5	6.11*
Eleventh grade				
Academic				
College	40.5	52.6	61.9	45.95***
Good grades	42.8	52.3	47.8	9.03*
Social				
Friends	43.2	22.6	25.3	58.93***
Sports	32.2	31.1	26.6	4.19
Dating	32.5	28.3	17.1	33.20***
Job	35.8	39.3	25.0	25.25***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Percent of students whose perception of parental values agreed with the parents' actual values

	Japan	Taiwan	US	X^2
Fifth grade				
Mothers				
Math	32.7	50.4	63.7	25.43***
Reading	35.7	42.0	64.1	25.58***
Father				
Math	31.2	42.5	58.7	12.82**
Reading	24.0	42.5	57.3	19.94***
Eleventh grade				
Academic				
College	--	36.3	55.2	13.77***
Good grades	--	32.8	35.4	.27
Social				
Friends	--	14.8	18.8	1.02
Sports	--	18.9	22.7	.81
Dating	--	21.5	23.8	.28
Job	--	38.3	21.0	13.57***

Note: Data for Japanese eleventh graders are not available.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Correlations between acceptance of parental values and students' psychological well-being

	Japan	Taiwan	US
Depression	-.04	-.16***	-.14**
Stress	-.05	-.09*	-.10*
Aggressive feelings	-.12**	-.17***	-.20***
Life dissatisfaction	-.07	-.15***	-.17***
Psychosomatic symptoms	-.04	-.11*	-.10*
N	473-494	497-500	504-505

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Mean ratings of students' own values and their perceptions of parental values